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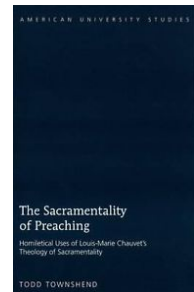
Book Review

The Sacramentality of Preaching: Homiletical Uses of Louis-Marie Chauvet's Theology of Sacramentality

Todd Townshend

New York: Peter Lang, 2009

In this book, Todd Townsend, Lecturer in Homiletics at the Anglican seminary, Huron College, has deepened the discussion of the relationship of preaching and worship. Drawing on the sacramental theology of Louis-Marie Chauvet, Townshend has located preaching through the Trinitarian life of God in the church as it relates to scripture, sacrament, and ethics. To my mind, the book offers new vistas on how to think about the relationship of Word and Sacrament, the quality and nature of grace in a relational framework, and some practical areas of homiletical formation in light of those commitments.



Chapter One is devoted to defining key terms and surveying developments in theologies of Word and Sacrament in the twentieth century. Townshend notes some areas of convergence between Protestant and Roman Catholic theologians in the middle part of that century. What they “whispered” in their writings, Townshend hopes to embrace more deeply by relating Word and Sacrament more closely and relationally within the context of the church. For preaching this involves particularly a greater sense of “sacramentality,” which Townshend defines (following Kenan Osborne, *Christian Sacraments in a Postmodern World*) as happening when “there is an action of God, a blessing, and a subsequent human response.” Chapters Two and Three then explore elements of Chauvet’s theory by looking first at Chauvet’s structure of the symbolic order and its dynamic as symbolic exchange. The complexity of Chauvet’s work is a bit of an acquired taste, but the impact of it for Townshend’s thought is important. In Chauvet’s theory he sees an opportunity for homiletical and liturgical theologians to look beyond the means of grace, or grace itself, as an object, but as a meditational and relational reality. The discussion of grace here was particularly insightful and offered an interesting vista for considering the whole metaphor of gift beyond the bi-relational model (God and me) to include a ternary relation (God, me, and neighbour). Chapters Four and Five then bring this conversation to bear first with respect to contemporary homiletic theory and then to practice, especially as it pertains to teaching and learning homiletics in the classroom. While Townshend makes no earth-shaking claims here, bits and pieces of his reflections are well worth carrying forward: for example, the relationship of Word and Sacrament, as well as the importance of the kind of *theological formation (habitus)* that needs to happen in the preaching classroom.

There are of course some minor critiques to be ventured with a work that presses us more deeply into the sacramentality of preaching. At one point, Townshend sets up poles for proclamation and sacrament to help us see their complementarity: proclamation's horizon of *announcement* "says something about something" and sacrament's horizon of *encounter* "says something to someone." While Townshend is careful to describe these as horizons, I am not sure these poles are as helpful as we imagine. The language which links proclamation to encounter is significant – one thinks, for example, of H. H. Farmer's *Servant of the Word* which was also published in this same period. Townshend's concern about the language of "means of grace" as being problematic for reasons of "instrumentality" seems at least partly out of place to me as well. The language of means of grace is important to the Reformation as a way of *holding* to the significance of the sacraments, not instrumentalizing them. In fact, in Luther's case there is a sense in which there is of all things a privileged sense of the role of language in determining this: that is, in line with the Augustinian tradition, that a sacrament is Word plus sign. In my view, Townshend, in following Chauvet, reads the language of "means of grace" through the instrumentalizing view of modernism, rather than the more fulsome views of the Reformers themselves.

Despite these concerns, I still heartily recommend Townshend's work. He does show in particular how Chauvet's theory can be used to deepen our appreciation of sacramental grace as relation and encourages us to embrace the *theological* formation of preachers in new and exciting ways.

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